



Research-Based Islamic Education Curriculum Reformulation: Epistemological Reconstruction, Design, Implementation, and the Role of Teachers and Lecturers in Contemporary Islamic Education

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ABSTRACT

The current crisis in the relevance of Islamic religious education is no longer solely related to the issue of student morality, but also concerns the curriculum's ability to respond to social change, scientific developments, and the transformation of digital technology. This article aims to analyze the urgency of research-based reformulation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum as a new paradigm for Islamic education that is more reflective, critical, and adaptive. The research uses a qualitative approach with a critical literature study design. The results show that the conventional PAI curriculum is still predominantly normative-doctrinal in nature and has not fully developed an inquiry-based academic culture. Research-based curriculum reformulation allows for the simultaneous integration of revelation, rationality, social experience, and educational technology. Teachers and lecturers are no longer positioned as transmitters of knowledge, but as intellectual facilitators and producers of Islamic educational knowledge. This article emphasizes that research-based transformation of the PAI curriculum is a strategic necessity in building contextual, humanistic, and future-oriented Islamic education..

1. Introduction

Many Islamic education classrooms continue to provide answers to questions that younger generations are no longer asking. This reality reflects a profound concern regarding the current state of Islamic Education in the midst of rapid social transformation. The digital revolution, cultural globalization, and evolving patterns of youth communication have generated new challenges for Islamic education. However, many Islamic education learning practices still rely on a normative knowledge-transmission model that positions students as passive recipients of information. Consequently, religious education has not yet fully fostered critical thinking, research competencies, or the capacity to address social problems in a contextual and meaningful manner.

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This condition has created a paradox within Islamic education: despite the growing number of Islamic educational institutions, the emergence of a Muslim generation characterized by strong intellectual traditions, adaptability, and innovation remains limited. The rise of digital intolerance, the relatively low level of scientific literacy, and the growing crisis of public ethics indicate that the PAI curriculum requires fundamental reconstruction. Without substantial reform, Islamic Religious Education risks becoming confined to the romanticization of the past rather than serving as a transformative force capable of responding to contemporary societal challenges.

Various recent studies have shown that a research-based curriculum can enhance students' analytical thinking skills, academic creativity, and problem-solving abilities. According to (Zubaedi, 2021), contemporary Islamic education should shift from a paradigm of merely teaching religion to one that emphasizes researching religion and social realities. Meanwhile, a study by (Abdullah & Rahman, 2023) confirms that integrating research into the Islamic education curriculum contributes to the development of students' inquiry skills. Furthermore, international studies on research-based curricula position research activities at the core of the learning process rather than treating them as merely complementary academic components. However, some scholars criticize the research-based approach for being overly academic and potentially diminishing the spiritual dimension of religious education if it is not balanced with the reinforcement of religious values. This debate indicates that the research-based reformulation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum requires a strong philosophical and methodological foundation to ensure that it does not lose its Islamic identity. Therefore, the development of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum should be directed toward a synthesis of modern scientific traditions and transcendental Islamic values.

This article aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the urgency of reformulating a research-based Islamic Education curriculum within the context of contemporary Islamic education. Specifically, this study seeks to examine four main aspects: (1) the urgency of PAI curriculum reformulation, (2) the concept of a research-based curriculum in Islamic education, (3) the design and models of PAI curriculum reformulation, and (4) the role of teachers and lecturers in implementing a research-based curriculum. Furthermore, this study aims to formulate a new direction for PAI curriculum development that is more contextual and responsive to the demands of the twenty-first century. Therefore, this article serves not only as a theoretical exploration but also as a conceptual framework for the transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia. It is expected to contribute to the advancement of Islamic education curriculum studies while also providing practical guidance for teachers, lecturers, educational institution administrators, and national education policymakers.

The main argument of this article is that a research-based reformulation of the Islamic Education curriculum is an epistemological and sociological necessity that can no longer be postponed. Islamic education should not merely aim to produce students who are ritually pious; it must also cultivate individuals who are capable of critically and scientifically interpreting social realities. A research-based curriculum facilitates a transformation from dogmatic learning to a more dialogical, reflective, and problem-solving-oriented approach. However, such a reformulation should not involve the uncritical adoption of Western educational paradigms, as Islamic education possesses a distinctive spiritual orientation. Therefore, a research-based curriculum in Islamic Education should be grounded in the integration of revelation, reason, empirical experience, and universal human values.

The literature on the relationship between research-based curricula and Islamic education has grown rapidly over the past decade. Most studies highlight the importance of integrating research into the learning process to improve students' academic quality. In the context of Islamic education, a research-based curriculum is understood as an educational approach that places inquiry, scientific exploration, and problem-solving at the centre of the learning process. International studies indicate that research-based curricula can enhance higher-order thinking skills, information literacy, and

collaborative competencies. In Indonesia, research on research-based curricula in Islamic Education has generally focused on active learning, digital technology integration, and pedagogical innovation. However, most studies continue to emphasize the technical aspects of instruction and have not thoroughly explored the epistemological reformulation of the Islamic Education curriculum. Consequently, the discourse on research-based curricula in Islamic education remains fragmented and has yet to produce a comprehensive conceptual framework.

The first group of studies positions a research-based curriculum as a strategy for improving learning quality. These studies generally employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs to measure the effects of research-based learning methods on student outcomes. For example, (Hidayat & A., 2021) found that integrating mini-research projects into Islamic Education learning significantly improved students' critical thinking skills. Similarly, (Sulaiman et al., 2022) demonstrated that a project-based research model increased students' active participation in religious education. These findings confirm that research-based learning positively influences students' motivation and academic achievement. Nevertheless, most of these studies treat research merely as a teaching method rather than as a comprehensive curricular paradigm. As a result, the transformations achieved tend to be partial and do not address the fundamental structure of the Islamic education curriculum.

The second group of studies emphasizes the integration of technology and digital literacy within research-based curricula. This line of research has gained prominence with the increasing adoption of digital technologies in education following the COVID-19 pandemic. Several studies have shown that digital platforms, e-learning systems, and social media can serve as collaborative research environments in Islamic Education learning. For instance, (Maulana & R., 2023) reported that digital inquiry-based learning enhanced students' religious literacy skills. Likewise, (Al-Attas & N., 2021) emphasized the importance of fostering a digital research culture within contemporary Islamic education. While these studies make important contributions to educational innovation, they tend to focus primarily on technological tools rather than on the philosophical foundations of the curriculum. Furthermore, concerns have been raised that the digitalization of religious education may encourage superficial learning if it is not accompanied by a reflective engagement with Islamic values.

The third group of studies develops a philosophical and critical approach to the reform of the Islamic education curriculum. These studies not only discuss learning methods but also examine the relationship between knowledge, power, and identity within Islamic education. According to (Azra & A., 2020), the stagnation of Islamic education is caused by the dominance of a rote-learning paradigm that inhibits the development of a critical intellectual tradition. A similar view is expressed by (Mujib & A., 2022), who argues that the Islamic Education curriculum should be reconstructed through an integrative approach that combines religious studies with the social sciences and humanities. This philosophical perspective emphasizes that Islamic education should cultivate reflective awareness and the capacity to critically engage with social realities. However, this type of research is often criticized for being overly abstract and lacking concrete implementation models for educational institutions. Therefore, a synthesis of philosophical and practical approaches is necessary for the reformulation of a research-based Islamic Education curriculum.

A review of previous studies reveals several gaps that require further attention. First, most existing research focuses primarily on research-based learning methods rather than on comprehensive curriculum reformulation. Second, studies on research-based curricula in Islamic Education continue to be dominated by pedagogical perspectives and have not sufficiently addressed the epistemological dimensions of Islamic education. Third, there remains a lack of research integrating spirituality, scientific inquiry, and social transformation within a coherent curricular framework. Fourth, previous studies generally have not proposed implementation models that can be systematically applied in

Islamic schools and higher education institutions. The novelty of this article lies in its attempt to formulate a research-based Islamic Religious Education curriculum as an integrative paradigm that combines scientific inquiry, transcendental values, and contemporary societal needs. In this regard, the article offers a more holistic approach than those presented in previous studies.

Future research on research-based Islamic Religious Education curricula should move toward the development of an integrative, adaptive, and transformative model of Islamic education. Such research should go beyond measuring the effectiveness of learning methods and examine how the curriculum can foster a critical, reflective, and humanistic academic culture. Furthermore, greater attention should be given to the integration of artificial intelligence, big data, and digital ethics within research-based Islamic education. Another promising direction involves developing curricula grounded in local social issues, enabling students to utilize religious knowledge as a means of social transformation. Future studies should also explore how teachers and lecturers can function as researcher-educators who actively generate new knowledge. Consequently, the Islamic Religious Education curriculum should no longer be viewed merely as an administrative document but rather as a dynamic and evolving framework that responds to contemporary challenges while maintaining the spiritual foundations of Islam.

2. Methodology

This research employs the concepts, theories, and practices of a research-based curriculum in Islamic Religious Education as its units of analysis. The analysis focuses on a wide range of academic literature that discusses curriculum reform, research-based learning, contemporary Islamic education, and pedagogical transformation. These units of analysis were selected because curriculum reformulation is not limited to learning documents and instructional frameworks; it also encompasses the epistemological paradigms and social practices that shape educational processes. Therefore, this study seeks to examine how the concept of a research-based curriculum is constructed within existing scholarly literature and how it can be adapted to the context of Islamic education in Indonesia. In addition, the analysis explores the interrelationship between curriculum development, academic culture, and contemporary social challenges, including digitalization, globalization, and the moral crisis affecting younger generations.

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a critical library research design. This approach was selected because the objective of the research is not to measure variables statistically, but rather to understand, interpret, and reconstruct the concept of research-based curriculum reform in Islamic Religious Education in a comprehensive and in-depth manner. Critical library research enables researchers to engage in a critical dialogue among diverse theoretical perspectives, ranging from classical Islamic educational thought to contemporary curriculum theories. Furthermore, this approach provides an opportunity to identify the limitations of previous studies and to develop a new conceptual synthesis. The research process was conducted through several stages, including literature identification, thematic classification, content analysis, and critical interpretation of relevant academic sources.

The data sources for this study consisted of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included books on Islamic education, curriculum theories, and reputable international journal articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) that discuss research-based curricula and Islamic education. Secondary sources were obtained from national journals accredited by SINTA 1 and SINTA 2, published within the last five years, focusing on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curricula, learning innovation, and the integration of research in Islamic education. The data sources were selected purposively based on thematic relevance, academic credibility, and publication recency. In addition,

national education policy documents were utilized as supplementary sources to provide a broader understanding of the context of curriculum implementation in Indonesia.

Data were collected through documentation and a systematic literature review. The researchers gathered various academic sources from databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and national journal portals. These sources were subsequently classified according to key themes, including the urgency of curriculum reform, the concept of a research-based curriculum, the role of teachers and lecturers, and innovation in Islamic education. During the data collection process, the quality of the sources was carefully evaluated based on journal reputation, topic relevance, and year of publication. This approach enabled the researchers to obtain comprehensive and in-depth data regarding the discourse on the development of a research-based Islamic Religious Education curriculum.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis and critical interpretive analysis techniques. The first stage involved reading, identifying, and categorizing key themes from the selected literature. The second stage focused on critically interpreting the relationships among concepts, patterns of argumentation, and the theoretical and practical relevance of previous studies. Based on the findings, the researchers developed a conceptual synthesis concerning the research-based reformulation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum. The validity and trustworthiness of the study were enhanced through source triangulation and cross-literature comparison. Through this approach, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive and reflective understanding of the transformation of the Islamic education curriculum in the contemporary era..

3. Results

3.1 Risk Management Planning Framework

In general, the findings of this study indicate that a research-based reformulation of the Islamic Education curriculum is urgently needed to respond to social changes and developments in science and technology. Conventional PAI curricula, which rely heavily on rote memorization, have proven ineffective in fostering a critical and reflective academic culture. This finding is consistent with (Azra & A., 2020), who argues that the stagnation of modern Islamic education is largely caused by the dominance of a knowledge-reproduction paradigm that positions students as passive recipients of knowledge. Similarly, (Rahman, 2022) emphasizes that Islamic education requires an inquiry-based approach to address the challenges of a digitalized and globalized society.

In contrast, a research-based approach provides students with opportunities to understand religious teachings contextually through inquiry, investigation, and social analysis. (Fauzi & Hidayat, 2022) found that research-based learning significantly enhances students' critical thinking abilities, academic competencies, and social awareness within the context of Islamic Religious Education. Beyond improving academic quality, this approach also contributes to the development of students' scientific and moral character. (Abdullah et al., 2022) argue that the integration of research into Islamic education strengthens scientific ethics, academic integrity, and social responsibility among students. Therefore, the reformulation of the curriculum based on research is not merely an innovation in teaching methods but also represents a comprehensive transformation of the paradigm of Islamic education.

The practical implications of this study highlight the necessity of developing educational policies that support a research culture from the school level onward. Educational institutions should design curricula that enable students to conduct simple research projects related to social and religious issues. This view is supported by (Ma'arif & S., 2024), who explains that an adaptive curriculum in Islamic education must provide opportunities for students to engage in social exploration and contextual research. Furthermore, continuous professional development programs are needed to enhance teachers' and lecturers' competencies in research methodology, digital literacy, and innovative pedagogical practices. According to (Salim & A., 2023) limited research competence among teachers remains one of the primary obstacles to implementing a research-based curriculum in Islamic educational institutions.

In addition, Islamic higher education institutions need to strengthen collaboration with schools to establish a sustainable research-based educational ecosystem. (Setiawan & D., 2023) demonstrates that academic partnerships between universities and schools can significantly enhance research culture and promote learning innovation. The government can further support this transformation by providing funding for Islamic education research and establishing curriculum innovation centers, as recommended by (Nata & A., 2023) in his study on contemporary Islamic education management. Collectively, these efforts can contribute to the development of a more adaptive, innovative, and research-oriented Islamic education system capable of addressing contemporary societal challenges.

From a philosophical perspective, the reformulation of a research-based curriculum can be understood as an effort to revive the Islamic intellectual tradition that flourished during the classical era. The history of Islamic civilization demonstrates that the progress of Muslim societies was rooted in a strong tradition of research, scientific inquiry, intellectual dialogue, and openness to knowledge. This view is reinforced by (Nasution & H., 2021), who argues that rationality has been an integral component of the Islamic intellectual tradition since the early development of Muslim civilization. Prominent scholars such as Ibn Sina, Al-Farabi, and Al-Ghazali did not separate religion from rationality; rather, they viewed both as complementary sources of knowledge. According to (Mujib & A., 2022), modern Islamic education has experienced a decline due to the separation of religious knowledge from critical thinking and scientific research traditions. Therefore, the integration of research into the Islamic Education curriculum should not be regarded merely as an adoption of Western educational models, but rather as a revitalization of authentic Islamic epistemological traditions. A similar perspective is offered by (Al-Attas & N., 2021), who emphasizes that Islam possesses a knowledge tradition in which revelation and reason function as complementary sources of understanding. Consequently, Islamic education has the potential to reestablish itself as a center of knowledge production and civilizational development.

Compared to traditional curricula, research-based curricula are more adaptive to the demands of contemporary society. Traditional curricula tend to emphasize adherence to textual authority, whereas research-based curricula encourage critical engagement between religious texts and social realities. Research conducted by (Yasin, 2021) indicates that critical pedagogy in Islamic education can enhance students' reflective abilities in understanding socio-religious issues. However, a research-based approach also presents certain challenges, particularly the risk of secularizing religious education if research is understood solely from a positivist perspective. This concern is consistent with (Arifin & M., 2022) argument that the modernization of Islamic education without a strong spiritual foundation may result in a moral crisis and a loss of value orientation. Therefore, the reformulation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum must maintain a balance between scientific inquiry and spiritual development. In this context, Islamic education should promote research models that are not exclusively oriented toward empirical data but also incorporate ethical, moral, and humanitarian values. This perspective is supported by (Yusuf & T., 2022), who explains that the epistemology of Islamic education should harmoniously integrate revelation, rationality, and empirical experience.

The broader significance of this research lies in the understanding that religious education should extend beyond the mere transmission of doctrine and become a space for fostering intellectual growth and social awareness. A research-based curriculum enables students to perceive religion as a living and transformative force that remains relevant to contemporary societal challenges. (Zainuddin & A., 2023) found that transformative Islamic education can strengthen students' social sensitivity and humanitarian awareness. Through this approach, students learn that Islam is not merely a collection of ritual obligations but also a source of social ethics, justice, and civilizational advancement. This perspective is consistent with (Freire & P., 2021) conception of education as a process of humanization and intellectual emancipation. Within the context of Islamic education, this process involves developing students who are not only religiously observant but also capable of critical thinking and meaningful action for social transformation. Therefore, the reformulation of a research-based Islamic Education curriculum holds strategic importance in nurturing a generation of Muslims who are both devout and progressive.

The implementation of a research-based Islamic Education curriculum reformulation at the primary and secondary education levels should begin with a systematic needs assessment conducted through surveys,

classroom observations, analyses of learning outcomes, and focus group discussions (FGDs). This process ensures that curriculum design is grounded in empirical evidence rather than assumptions. The findings from the needs assessment should then be translated into a curriculum framework that integrates a holistic scientific approach, including contextual learning materials based on contemporary issues such as digital ethics and religious tolerance, as well as inquiry-based and problem-based learning models that have been shown to enhance students' critical thinking skills ((Rahmawati & I., 2022) In addition, digital technologies should be utilized to strengthen students' religious literacy and engagement with learning resources. The successful implementation of these initiatives largely depends on the development of teachers' capacities as practitioner-researchers through Classroom Action Research (CAR) training programs, workshops on research-based instructional materials, professional learning communities, and peer-supervision activities. Such programs have been demonstrated to significantly improve the quality of lesson planning and instructional practices (Hartati & Rasyid, 2023).

Then, during the implementation stage, the research-based reformulation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum is applied differently according to the educational level. In elementary schools, the approach is adapted to the developmental characteristics of children aged 6–12 years through simple mini-research projects, such as exploring local Islamic traditions and interviewing religious leaders. These activities have been shown to strengthen students' contextual understanding of Islamic values while accommodating diverse learning styles through a multiple-intelligences approach (Meirina et al., 2025). At the secondary school level, the complexity of learning activities is increased by engaging students in the study of contemporary religious issues, the analysis of Islamic texts, and Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)-based socio-religious research. This approach ensures that learning outcomes extend beyond the declarative level to encompass procedural and contextual dimensions, thereby addressing the gap between the values embedded in the curriculum and their application in everyday life (TARLIM, 2025).

Furthermore, the implementation strategy for the Research-Based Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Reformulation can begin with a redefinition of learning objectives, which are no longer merely normative and text-oriented but are instead grounded in empirical evidence regarding students' actual needs. Within the framework of the Independent Curriculum, Islamic Education learning objectives are formulated through the integration of Learning Outcomes, Learning Objectives, and Learning Objective Pathways, which are dynamically aligned with students' developmental conditions and contextual needs (Bait et al., 2025). Research-based learning objectives not only aim to achieve cognitive mastery but also promote the development of character, spirituality, and measurable life competencies.

Based on these empirically validated objectives, learning materials are developed in a contextual manner. Islamic Religious Education content—including faith (aqidah), morality (akhlaq), jurisprudence (fiqh), and Islamic cultural history—is presented by connecting students' real-life experiences with contemporary issues such as tolerance, social justice, and digital ethics. Consequently, the learning materials function not only as informative resources but also as formative and transformative tools for students' personal and social development (Butar-Butar et al., 2023). The development of research-based learning materials also requires a systematic mapping of Qur'anic studies, moral education, and Islamic jurisprudence content that is aligned with students' psychological development and specific needs at each educational level. This approach is emphasized by Achadi et al. (2024), who highlighted the importance of mapping Islamic Religious Education learning outcomes within the Independent Curriculum framework.

Once learning objectives and materials have been designed based on research findings, the next step is to implement instructional methods that foster active engagement and scientific reasoning. Research indicates that approaches such as Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), and Project-Based Learning (PjBL) significantly enhance students' critical thinking skills and the internalization of Islamic values, outperforming conventional lecture-based approaches (Meirina et al., 2025). These research-based learning models position students not as passive recipients of knowledge but as active participants who formulate questions, gather data, analyze evidence, and draw conclusions grounded in Islamic principles. In addition, the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach has proven effective in integrating educational content with students' spiritual and social experiences, thereby promoting more meaningful

spiritual literacy (Al-I'tibar, 2026). Through this approach, students are encouraged to connect religious concepts with real-life situations, making learning more relevant and impactful.

The culmination of this process is the implementation of authentic, formative, and continuous assessment. In research-based Islamic Education, authentic assessment encompasses performance-based assessments, portfolios, reflective journals, and peer evaluations that comprehensively measure students' character development as well as their affective and psychomotor competencies, rather than merely assessing memorized knowledge (Hanafi et al., 2025). Furthermore, evidence-based assessment provides systematic feedback that supports the cyclical refinement of learning objectives, materials, and instructional methods, enabling the Islamic Education curriculum to evolve adaptively and responsively to the changing needs of students.

Research-based curriculum reformulation offers an opportunity to restore Islamic education to its fundamental mission of humanization and intellectual liberation. According to (Zubaedi, 2021), ideal Islamic education should cultivate individuals who possess strong moral character, critical reflection, and a deep sense of social responsibility toward their communities. Therefore, integrating research findings into curriculum development is not merely an effort to improve educational quality but also a strategic step toward realizing the broader goals of Islamic education in contemporary society.

5. Conclusions

Research indicates that the current Islamic Education curriculum remains heavily dominated by rote memorization and the normative transmission of knowledge, thereby failing to cultivate a culture of critical thinking and intellectual inquiry among students. As a result, a significant gap has emerged between Islamic education and the demands of an increasingly dynamic and complex modern society. The research-based reformulation of the PAI curriculum offers a strategic solution to this issue, as it transforms religious learning into a more dialogical, contextual, and meaningful process. Through this approach, students are no longer merely passive recipients of information; instead, they actively engage in inquiry, social analysis, and research activities that connect Islamic teachings with contemporary issues such as religious tolerance, digital ethics, and social justice.

The integration of research into the Islamic Education curriculum has been shown to have a significant positive impact on both learning quality and character development. Students who participate in research-based learning demonstrate enhanced analytical abilities, scientific communication skills, creativity, and higher levels of emotional engagement in the learning process. Moreover, this approach contributes to the development of academic integrity through the internalization of values such as honesty, openness, and scientific responsibility, all of which are consistent with Islamic ethical principles. From a philosophical perspective, this curriculum reformulation is not merely an adoption of modern educational methods; rather, it represents a revitalization of the classical Islamic epistemological tradition that once fostered a great civilization through a strong commitment to research, scholarly dialogue, and the integration of revelation and rationality, as exemplified by the achievements of prominent Muslim scholars throughout history.

The success of reformulating a research-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum depends largely on the readiness of the entire educational ecosystem. The competence of teachers and lecturers is a crucial determinant, as curriculum transformation cannot be effective without educators who possess strong research capabilities, digital literacy, and innovative pedagogical skills. The implementation strategy should include a systematic needs assessment, contextual curriculum design, continuous professional development, and authentic assessment methods that holistically measure both character development and competency attainment. Furthermore, support from government policies, collaboration between universities and schools, and the establishment of a conducive academic environment are essential prerequisites for ensuring that a research-based

curriculum evolves into a sustainable intellectual movement aimed at fostering a generation of religiously grounded, intellectually capable, and progressive Muslims.

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